

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A bill introduced by Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) was approved Wednesday morning by the House of Representatives by voice vote. The legislation will improve America's civilian response capacity for troubled regions around the world.

The legislation, called the "Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act," will authorize the president to provide assistance to support countries and regions facing conflict or civil strife. It will also formally create the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization within the State Department, which would provide civilian management of global stabilization and reconstruction efforts.

"In recent years, our military has been forced to shoulder nation-building duties that they aren't trained for and are ill-equipped to fulfill," said Rep. Farr. "The State Department and USAID, which should be carrying the burden of stabilization and reconstruction activities, lack the resources to do so. This bill will create a coordinating office and a response corps trained to assist unstable regions, providing a civilian solution when it is most appropriate."

The bill was debated on the House floor, with both Republicans and Democrats speaking in glowing terms. In presenting the bill, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-Calif.) said: "In the short-term, the bill will ease the burden on the armed forces by allowing the State Department to deploy civilians in crisis situations previously staffed by the military. In the long-term, the bill will enable the U.S. government to project smart power in situations that cry for such civilian expertise."

Rep. Gus Bilirakis, a Republican on the Foreign Affairs Committee, thanked Rep. Farr for sponsoring the bill, saying, "These new corps will work to prevent future conflicts overseas and ensure we are better prepared to effectively address post-conflict scenarios in countries that are important to our nations security interests."

The bill will create three new response groups: an Active Response Corps of 250 individuals at the federal level, most from the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development; a Stand-by Response Corps of 2,000 individuals, also from federal agencies; and a Civilian Reserve Corps made up of 5,000 individuals from the state and local level, including firemen, police officers, judges, health experts and more.

A companion bill in the Senate, introduced by Sens. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), has also passed out of committee and awaits consideration by the full Senate. Once that bill is voted on, a conference committee will iron out differences before sending the bill to the White House. The Bush administration supports the bill, having already requested nearly \$250 million for stabilization and reconstruction activities.

"Among the many lessons we've learned in Afghanistan and Iraq is that the U.S. military is not the right tool for every job," Rep. Farr said. "We've allowed the civilian side of the equation to suffer, and we've paid the price. To win the peace and rebuild countries, we must invest in our civilian agencies and train them for the task."

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